DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 247 661 EA 017 098

AUTHOR Smith, Edward C.
TITLE Longer School Years: Reform or Illusion? Policy Studies in Education.
INSTITUTION Learn, Inc., The Education Foundation, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 83
NOTE 12p.
AVAILABLE FROM Publications Sales, Learn, Inc., 655 15th Street, N.W., Suite 310, Washington, DC 20005 ($3.00; quantity discounts).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Cost Effectiveness; *Educational Change; Educational Improvement; Elementary Secondary Education; *Extended School Day; *Extended School Year; Family Environment; *Family School Relationship; Home Study; *School Effectiveness; *Time Factors (Learning); Time on Task

ABSTRACT

The advantages and disadvantages of the year-round school fall into three major categories: financial, educational, and professional. Financial advantages are based on the postponement of construction costs and the use of existing school facilities and equipment to serve a larger number of students. Financial disadvantages include a rise in operational and maintenance costs, facility remodeling, and startup money required for the conversion to a year-round program. Educational advantages include acceleration of advanced students and remediation for the slow learner, and the employment of more male teachers. However, the shorter terms necessitated by extending the year may lead to impersonal student-teacher relations. Professional disputes will arise over methods of determining teacher salaries for additional teaching time. In opposition to lengthening the school day and school year, the American Federation of Teachers states that schools should use the time they currently have more effectively. Analyses of previous studies have found the effects of time measures on student achievement to be weak. To improve our schools we should encourage students to do more and better school work at home under the supervision and support of parents. (MLF)

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POLICY STUDIES IN EDUCATION

ED247661

Longer School Years: Reform or Illusion?

by Edward C. Smith

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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1983

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LEARN, Inc., is a private, tax-exempt research foundation specializing in education policy and supported entirely by voluntary contributions. We believe that the collapse of educational excellence in the 1960's and 1970's was caused by the neglect of certain fundamental principles. Until educators are willing once again to heed those principles, schools will continue to be places of frustration and despair.

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1. Not all subjects are equal: there are certain basic skills which students should not be free to avoid. These include competence at reading, writing and mathematics, and acquaintance with the worlds of literature, art and music, history, politics, and the natural sciences.

2. Real learning is hard work: homework, tests, and grading should be restored to their rightful places.

3. A sound disciplinary climate, with swift and sure penalties for misbehavior, is indispensable for academic effectiveness.

4. School faculties need more liberal-arts graduates with some measure of real learning, and fewer alumni of the warehouses for the semi-competent called "teacher colleges."

5. Schools should pay more attention to excellence than to equality. The schools which contribute most to the cause of equality are precisely those which concentrate on excellence.

6. Schools need leaders, not mere functionaries. Vigorous, responsible leadership is incompatible with the crazy-quilt of overlapping State and Federal agencies which have acquired the power to regulate, limit, and reverse local decisions.

7. Monopolies hurt both consumers and producers, and violate the basic principles of a pluralistic society. Vouchers, tax credits, and similar mechanisms for broadening parental choice are essential to education reform.

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LONGER SCHOOL YEARS:

REFORM OR ILLUSION?

by Edward C. Smith

It is now almost universally agreed that America's children do not spend enough time doing real schoolwork. There is rather less agreement on what to do about this. One approach is to spend less time on marginal subjects and activities like driver education and cheerleading, so that more time is available for the core academic disciplines. Another, more controversial, proposal is to increase the total length of the school day and the school year. This second proposal received a hefty boost last year when the National Commission on Excellence in Education released its report on the "rising tide of mediocrity" in America's schools.

During the 19th century, American public schools were often open only for a few months during the winter between the fall harvesting season and the spring planting time. As the United States became more industrialized and urbanized and thereby less agrarian, the school term gradually expanded. By the turn of the century, the average public school was in session for about 145 days per year. Today, most public school have a 180-day year. The typical school day is about six hours long, and it has been found that the average U.S. high school student spends about five hours each day in credit classes.

In time, the public school were assigned many roles and responsibilities formerly the exclusive charter of families, churches, clubs, civic organizations etc. As a consequence, the curriculum steadily expanded to encompass many non-academic but "socially significant" course areas ranging the spectrum from driver education, sex education, typing, nutrition and health maintenance and so on. There is much evidence to show that this stretching of the school's role in the community has had an adverse effect upon its resources and has done much to make shallow its original reasons for existence.

- In many schools, the time spent learning how to cook and drive counts as much toward a high school diploma as the time spent studying mathematics, English, chemistry, U.S. History, or biology.

- A study of the school week in the United States found that some schools provided students only 17 hours of academic instruction during the week, and the average school provided about 22.

Professor Edward C. Smith, a father of six, teaches at the American University, The Heights School, and the Tenley Study Center in Washington, D.C. A former member of the White House staff under President Carter, he is currently a consultant to the Library of Congress and Assistant Editor of The Lincoln Review.

- A California study of individual classrooms found that because of poor management of classroom time, some elementary students received only one-fifth of the instruction others received in reading comprehension.

- In most schools, the teaching of study skills is haphazard and unplanned. Consequently, many students complete high school and enter college without disciplined and systematic study habits.

There are those who argue that longer school days and years are the likely panacea for improving overall academic performance. Of course, like the issue of merit pay for teachers (which is thought by many to be another "quick fix" remedy for most of our society's scholastic ills), longer school days and years is a highly controversial topic with large, vocal constituencies on both sides of the debate.

The issue of year-round schools has been an item of analysis and experimentation for nearly two decades. Year-round schooling is generally pursued for one or more of the following reasons:

- To save money;

- To delay construction, thereby postponing bond issues and eliminating double sessions;

- To use present facilities to the maximum;

- To increase learning opportunities for disadvantaged students through remediation and for bright students through acceleration;

- To prevent loss of learning during summer months and to distribute instruction and vacation periods more evenly throughout the year;

- To increase teachers' earning power.

In reality, there are only two basic year-round plans: The 45/15 Plan and The Quarter Plan.

- The 45/15 Plan:

  In this plan there are four 45-day school sessions, each of which is followed by a 15-day vacation period. Thus there is a total of 180 school days for each student. If the sessions are staggered so that some students are on vacation while others are in school, this plan can effectively increase building capacity by 25 per cent to 33 per cent. But it does not lengthen any individual student's school year, and therefore it would not help solve the problems pinpointed by the Commission.

- The Quarter Plans:

  The basic Quarter Plan involves four quarters of 12 weeks each. This creates a 48-week school year with a four-week vacation period for

distribution on Christmas, Easter and other holidays. If students are required to attend all four quarters, this plan permits them to accelerate and complete four years of work in three years or to take additional courses. Teachers, as well as pupils, would work 48 weeks (240 days) with approximately one month remaining for vacation.

The advantages and disadvantages of the year-round school fall into three major categories: financial, educational, and professional. After review of the available literature, I see the following as the main arguments for and against an extended school year.

o ADVANTAGES:

Financial:

1. Construction costs are postponed. Existing school facilities may be used all year, thereby serving a larger number of students.

2. Additional equipment and supplies are not needed.

3. Vandalism during the summer months is reduced.

Educational:

1. Curriculum advances are possible. Scheduling flexibility is increased. More terminal course options are available and may be presented in any order. The exceptions are the math and language courses which, by nature, must be sequential.

2. Remediation is increased for the disadvantated or slow learner. Students who fail a course may repeat or may take a related course immediately.

3. Acceleration of the advanced student is possible.

4. Learning loss over long vacation periods is prevented. As a result, the instructional review time following vacation is diminished and often eliminated.

5. More male teachers (especially in the formative lower-grade levels where they are so notably absent) may enter the profession due to the overall increased earning potential of teachers. Hopefully, students from fatherless families will benefit from this relationship with adult male figures.

6. Reduced emotional tension and boredom in students yields fewer truancies and anti-social acts.

7. Individualization of instruction is encouraged with progress of pupils at their own rates.

Professional:

1. Increased salaries for increased work loads should help the teaching profession become competitive with other professions.

2. Juvenile delinquency problems may decline.

The opponents of year round schooling note the following disadvantages.

o DISADVANTAGES:

Financial:

1. The argument for savings from construction is misleading. The cost of new buildings is generally amortized over a long period of time and hence represents an insignificant amount of total cost of education per year.

2. Operational costs tend to rise. There are increased expenditures for such items as additional services, clerical aides, auxiliary school programs and related services. In addition, teacher salaries increase.

3. Maintenance costs mount. Major repairs are usually accomplished during summer months or extended vacation periods during the traditional school year. In year-round plans, extra maintenance crews must often work after school, on weekends, or at night. This may create extra expenses for overtime pay.

4. Startup money is required for the conversion to a year-round program. The average district may not have this original outlay.

5. Existing facilities may need remodeling. For example, air conditioning sufficient for summer use of classrooms is mandatory in most school districts. Also, many plans necessitate team teaching; such variants may require remodeling of facilities. In addition, provisions must be made for storage of equipment and professional materials while teachers are on vacation and during intersessions. When combined with items (2) and (3) above these new costs seem sure to make year-round schools more expensive than traditional programs.

Educational:

1. Shorter terms may lead to impersonal student-teacher relations.

2. The transfer student will very likely encounter difficulties.

3. Finally, it is presently unclear as to what actually constitutes a year of attendance for students.

Professional:

1. Inevitably, disputes will arise over methods of determining teacher salaries for additional teaching time. A clarification must be made as to what actually constitutes a full year of service for teachers and whether an additional quarter of service contributes to retirement formulas.

2. Problems facing administrators are numerous. These include:

   - o schedule-making four times per year
   - o placing transfer students
   - o orienting teachers
   - o exerting leadership over an instructional program consisting of autonomous, single quarter courses
   - o contacting parents
   - o maintaining classes of sufficient size in advanced areas to make them economically feasible
   - o changing curriculum and organization.

Another possible disadvantage of year-round schools is that the simple equation "more time equals more learning" may not turn out to be so simple or automatic. In her extensive study, Time on Task: A Research Review, Professor Nancy Karweit of the Center for Social Organization of Schools at the Johns Hopkins University, has carefully examined the issue of more time for more study through synthesizing the analyses of nearly all previous studies of the topic. Her findings are sobering and leave the reader in doubt as to whether "more" time automatically tranlates into "better" time in school. In a way, her findings remind one of the (often much deserved) criticism directed against the federal government for simply spending more money on social programs on the assumption that an increase in the quantity of funding would quite naturally produce an improvement in program quality. The nation has learned, at great cost, that this equation is fallacious.

Professor Karweit points out that "The Beginning Teacher Evaluation Study" (BTES) is probably the most widely known study to examine the effects of time on learning. Nevertheless, she concludes that the findings of this study are not as decisive as many think:

> "The most interesting finding of the BTES is that the connection between time and learning is as meager as it is. Given the carefulness of the study design and execution, it seems unlikely that measurement difficulties or problems with implementation of the study are totally responsible for the minimal effect detected. Basically, the BTES did not detect stronger effects for time measures on student achievement because the effects themselves are weak, not because of methodological or statistical artifacts."

Professor Karweit's study supports the following judgments:

1. Student diversity and group instruction pose a basic organizational dilemma for classroom teachers. Procedures to cope with student diversity include assignment to clases on the basis of ability grouping within clases, and individualizing instruction. These techniques affect the amount of time available for instruction.

2. The efficiency of any technique depends upon the trade-off between quantitative losses (e.g., increased procedural or management time) necessary to implement the technique and qualitative gains (e.g., greater efficiency of instruction) from using the technique.

3. The pace of instruction determines the amount of material that can be covered in a given span of time. In addition, the pace of instruction affects the appropriateness of instruction for a student. If instructional pace is too fast, the learner will not be able to master new material. Similarly, if the pace of instruction is too slow, the learner will not be able to learn at a rate which is optimal. The mismatches between the pace of instruction the student needs and the pace of instruction delivered reduce the efficiency of instruction. Some students' time is wasted because the students already know the material or got the idea in the first minutes of instruction, while other students' time is wasted because they will not be able to learn the lesson in the time allotted.

4. Techniques which accommodate student diversity in learning readiness and rate of retention are more likely to produce better academic performance than techniques which rely on gross (as opposed to net) quantity of instruction presented.

5. It is widely believed that recent studies of time and learning have produced conclusive and appreciable effects for time on learning. However, an unsentimental look does not support this belief. The view that time spent is equivalent to learning gained has become the newest myth to cloud our understanding of education.

In its opposition to lengthening the school day and school year, The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) takes the following position:

> "The AFT has expressed a willingness to study and consider specific proposals to lengthen the school day and school year. However, we do not consider it to be a high priority, or necessarily the best solution to a real problem. Before we move to costly reforms like these, we need to look at ways to use the current school day and school year more effectively.

> We need to study carefully how time is currently used in schools and how we can devote more time to teaching and learning. How much time do we use for the homeroom period, for study halls and 'activity' periods, for changing classes, and for courses that are not really important. . . . There is also a widely recognized fact that the amount of time school are in session cannot be increased without a corresponding increase in compensation for teachers and other school employees. Currently, American public schools cost about $125 billion per year. Since approximately eighty percent of this is personnel costs, every increase in the school year of ten days would add about $5.5 billion to school personnel costs. Therefore, a 220 day school year would cost an additional $22 billion for school employees. This does not even take into consideration any additional non-personnel costs of a longer school term."

The AFT statement concludes with the following observation:

> "One way to ensure that higher standards do not decrease enrollment in other essential courses is through more effective use of the time schools currently have at their disposal. Additional time for learning can also be gained in a far more cost-effective manner through increased homework assignments and improvements in the curriculum and instructional materials. Another difficulty with a longer school year or school day is that neither change is popular with the American public. The latest Gallup Poll on education showed that Americans oppose a longer school year 49% to 40%, and a longer school day 48% to 41%."

From an evaluation of all of the available evidence, it is clear that lengthening the school year would mean greatly increased operating costs for school districts. In addition, there are those who argue that a longer school year would adversely affect professional growth opportunities for teachers, for the simple reason that a great many colleges and universities schedule summer sessions. Yet another problem is the limited attention span of the typical elementary or secondary school student.

Children develop many social and learning skills during their early years -- skills that are ideally suited to be taught at home rather than at school. I am strongly in favor of encouraging students to do more and better school work at home under the supervision and support of parents and older siblings, and therefore I am strongly in favor of the retention of the traditional school day and calendar. On the other hand I realize how much our changing social mores have done to disrupt traditional family living patterns. The once widely practiced living arrangement which featured a working father, domesticated mother, and frequently live-in grandparents who made many substantive constributions to the family well-being, appears anachronistic and even "unreal" to single parents as well as to households where both parents work outside the home. To many such families, an extended

school day and year for their children is generally viewed in a positive light because it permits the school to assume the role of a surrogate parent (even an "extended family").

But experienced teachers would be the first to agree that schools do not make very good surrogate parents. Indeed, the ability of the schools to perform their traditional role depends heavily on family stability and support. Research on effective schooling has shown that family background is not the only thing that matters, but it is certainly one of the things that matter; other things being equal, children from intact, two-parent families who take an active interest in their academic progress will do better in school than children not so blessed.

This leads to an interesting paradox. By assuming the role of surrogate parents, schools may unwittingly encourage parents to "drop out" as educators of their own children, and thus in effect erode the very foundations of the children's sense of purpose, zeal, and commitment to learning. If schools go out of their way to promote the belief that "parenting" is an arbitrary, interchangeable set of tasks that can be performed just as well by paid outsiders as by real mothers and fathers, then some irresponsible parents will turn out to be all to ready to act on this false belief. The chhildren of these parents will be the first to suffer. To the extent that longer school days and years are "anti-family" in their effects they will therefore be "anti-education" as wel

A nation is a human thing; in its noblest form and function it is the extended family extended further through the common bond of citizenship. Consequently, our nation is at risk because our families are at risk. To improve our schools we must strengthen our homes, thereby providing a mutually supportive environment where families and faculties will be better able to perform their roles as co-educators.

If we look, we can find hundreds of schools, both public and private, which have escaped the "rising tide of mediocrity" by holding fast to certain fundamental truths, from which other schools can learn. One of those truths is that "more" and "better" are not always the same.

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